



DEVAL L. PATRICK  
GOVERNOR

TIMOTHY P. MURRAY  
LT. GOVERNOR

MARY ELIZABETH HEFFERNAN  
SECRETARY

*The Commonwealth of Massachusetts*  
*Executive Office of Public Safety and Security*  
*Department of Fire Services*

*P.O. Box 1025 ~ State Road*

*Stow, Massachusetts 01775*

*(978) 567~3100 Fax: (978) 567~3121*

*[www.mass.gov/dfs](http://www.mass.gov/dfs)*



STEPHEN D. COAN  
STATE FIRE MARSHAL

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Contact: Jennifer Mieth, (978) 567-3381  
[www.mass.gov/dfs](http://www.mass.gov/dfs)

### **May is National Electrical Safety Month**

May is National Electrical Safety Month, and State Fire Marshal Stephen D. Coan and Fire Chiefs' Association of Massachusetts President Paul Zbikowski want to raise awareness about potential home electrical hazards and the importance of electrical safety.

Coan said, "Our electrical needs are constantly growing so it is important to have a professional check-up of the electrical systems in our homes, just like taking the car to the mechanic. While major repairs can be costly, minor tune-ups can keep the system in good shape for a long time."

Chief Zbikowski said, "We offer the following tips to ensure a safe spring for you and your families:

- When unplugging an appliance do so by grasping the plug end not by pulling on the cord as this over time can cause the cord to fail;
- Make sure you have ground fault circuit breakers installed in your bathroom and kitchen;
- Have a licensed electrician properly install your swimming pool power connections;
- When leaving laptop computers, iPads and cell phones charging, have them on a solid surface such as a desk or countertop. Leaving them on a couch or chair can cause them to overheat and catch the material on fire; and
- Be sure electrical cords are not pinched by furniture."

### **690 Electrical Fires Caused 4 Civilian Deaths**

In 2010, local fire departments reported that there were 690 structure fires caused by electrical problems in Massachusetts. These fires caused four civilian deaths, one fire service death, 34 civilian injuries, 89 fire service injuries and an estimated dollar loss of \$30.1 million, accounting for 15% of the total dollar loss to fire in 2010. The average loss per fire was \$43,583.

*Administrative Services • Division of Fire Safety*  
*Hazardous Materials Response • Massachusetts Firefighting Academy*

**AFCIs, GFCIs and TRRs: Simple Safety Steps**

Fire officials wish to remind consumers about the importance of home safety devices that provide safety enhancements without requiring major renovations. These devices include arc fault circuit interrupters (AFCIs), ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs), and tamper resistant receptacles (TRRs). AFCIs replace standard circuit breakers in the home's electrical service panel and provide a higher level of electrical fire protection by detecting hazardous arcing conditions and shutting down the electricity before a fire can start. Installing ground fault circuit interrupter receptacles can help prevent electrocutions in the home when installed near water such as kitchens, bathrooms and outdoors. TRRs look just like ordinary outlets, but are designed with spring-loaded receptacle cover plates that close off the receptacle openings, or slots. This makes it hard for young children to stick anything into the outlet.

**Watch For Warning Signs**

Coan said, "Watch for warning signs of electrical problems such as:

- Fuses blowing or circuit breakers tripping frequently.
- Unusually warm or faulty outlets or switches.
- A vague smell of something burning.
- A sizzling sound in the wall. "

Any of these signs may indicate a potential problem. Contact a licensed electrician if you notice any of these signs, or contact the local fire department. Many departments now have new technologies such as thermal imaging cameras that can 'see' heat inside walls to detect potential problems before they expand and extend to other parts of the building.

Fuses and circuit breakers are safety devices. They blow or trip when the amount of current cannot safely travel through the wires. Trying to bypass the fuse or circuit breaker protection is an invitation to danger.

**Electrical Systems Pose Unseen Dangers**

Just as all systems need maintenance and inspection, so does electrical wiring. As switches, receptacles and connections age, heat is generated and the risk of fires inside walls and at poor connections greatly increases. Because wiring is often hidden behind walls, electrical faults may be hard to detect, except by properly trained electricians.

**Have Electrical Systems Examined by a Licensed Electrician Every 10 Years**

Have electrical systems examined by a licensed electrician every 10 years. A good electrician will look for electrical faults, check for warm switch plates and receptacles, and analyze the use of electricity to see if additional capacity is needed. It is important to help our homes keep up with the electrical demands of our changing lifestyles, changes in society and new technologies.

For more information on fire safety, contact your local fire department or the Office of the State Fire Marshal at **1-877-9 NO FIRE** or on-line at [www.state.ma.us/dfs](http://www.state.ma.us/dfs) and look for *Fire Safety Topics*.